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Soviet Increases Build-Up of Missiles and Develops a Defensive System

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In addition to deploying a missile defense around the Soviet Union, the Russians are markedly increasing the pace of their buildup of offensive missiles.

Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara chose to lift the security lid a crack when he announced at the LBJ Ranch in Texas Thursday that the Soviet Union was constructing antimissile missiles. But he did not disclose the even more startling intelligence on strategic forces that is stirring a vigorous debate within the Government over its implications.

For several years the Russians have been adding only about 30 to 50 intercontinental ballistic missiles a year to their nuclear arsenal. This rate has been increased, reliable sources say, to roughly 100 or more a year over the last two years.

Concern, Not Alarm

This combination of increased deployment of offensive and defensive missile systems is raising considerable concern, though not alarm, in high Administration circles.

Informed officials do not believe that Russia's burst of activity currently endangers the security of the United States.

A few, in fact, suggest that the nature of the system now showing up underscores the defense-mindedness of the Soviet leadership and could herald a period of greater stability between the two nuclear superpowers.

But other equally well informed strategists, including both military and civilian officials, privately express apprehension that, should the ICBM buildup continue for very long at its present pace, the uneasy balance of power between the two nations could be upset.

The worriers are not unmindful of the missile gap controversy in the late 1950's when some officials forecast a Soviet missile buildup on the basis of what Russia was capable of turning out; but during that period the Soviet Union decided not to go into mass production, while the United States went into a crash program, and the resulting missile gap strongly favored the American forces.

Wide Deployment Seen

This time, however, some officials note, the Russians are producing and deploying large numbers of advanced missiles and are both dispersing them widely over the Soviet Union and hardening them against possible attack.

Two kinds of these advanced, second-generation missiles, are apparently involved. One is a single-stage small missile similar to the early models of the Minuteman except that it is powered by a storable liquid

propellant rather than a solid fuel propellant. Like the Minuteman I, it is believed to carry a one megaton warhead. A megaton is equivalent to the energy produced by a million tons of TNT.

The other is a much larger, three-stage liquid-fueled system roughly comparable to America's Titan II missile. But it may carry an even bigger warhead, ranging from 30 to 60 megatons, sources say.

Trained on Targets

As recently as May of this year, unnamed "United States officials" put out information suggesting that the Russians possessed about 300 ICBM's in all. At present, it is understood, the number actually falls somewhere between 400 and 450. One reason for the dispiriting difference of opinion is when Russian missiles become fully operational and thus must be counted.

In addition, the Russians are believed to have about 120 to 150 submarine-launched missiles and about 750 medium and intermediate range missiles, the latter being trained on targets in Western Europe.

By comparison, the United States has a comfortable lead in numbers. Already, deployed are 800 Minutemen I missiles and 130 improved Minutemen II missiles, with 70 more Minutemen scheduled to be deployed to achieve a total force of 1,000. There are also 54 of the larger Titan II's. So far, 38 of 41 Polaris submarines have been put into service, each carries 16 Polaris missiles. Polaris missiles are believed to carry a warhead slightly under one megaton in yield.

But comparative statistics do not tell the whole story. Much depends on the kinds of missiles each side has and their respective capabilities against different types of targets.

Second-strike Force

For example, officials say that the bulk of the new missiles being deployed by the Russians are small and not very accurate, and thus best able to attack "soft" targets, like cities, rather than "hardened" missile launching sites.

In a situation where United States missile forces could absorb a first strike and still destroy most of Russia's cities in retaliation, some strategists point out, Soviet leaders are not about to build up a big force to kill American cities in an all-out surprise attack because this would virtually guarantee national suicide for the Russians.

Rather, these men insist, the missiles to be used against cities are probably meant to provide the Russians with their own second-strike force so that

if they are assaulted first by the United States, they can turn America into a nuclear wasteland. But if both sides clearly have such a capability, neither is likely to initiate nuclear war, the argument goes.

Up to this point in the argument the optimists and pessimists tend to agree. Divergence of views comes when they look to the future.

If the Russians continue to turn out more and more missiles, the pessimists say, they may pull abreast of and even overtake the United States nuclear lead. This might tempt some future Moscow leaders, in a crisis situation, to think they could destroy much of America's missile capability with a first strike, and intercept most remaining retaliatory missiles, particularly the Polaris missiles, with their new antimissile defense.

Secret Devices Set

The Administration has not been unaware of this potential danger. Over the last five years it has spent well above \$1-billion developing a variety of secret penetration devices designed to jam or fool an enemy missile defense so that attacking missiles can get through to their targets.

Many of these devices can be fitted onto existing land-based and sea-based missiles. And Mr. McNamara announced Thursday the likelihood that the Administration would ask Congress next year for money for the replacement of Polaris missiles with Poseidon missiles, which can carry twice as much payload and therefore much more penetration equipment.

Beyond that, the Administration is studying the possibility of building a new generation of much larger land-based missiles, called ICM for increased capability missile. This, too, would possess enough thrust to carry a vastly larger payload of penetration aids and advanced types of warheads.

Earlier this month the Pentagon commissioned the Institute for Defense Analysts to conduct a special nine-month study of the ICM and various re-basing concepts for it. The study group will be headed by Fred A. Payne, a highly regarded former Pentagon research specialist currently on leave from his job with the Marquardt Corporation.

New Bomber Proposed

And as one final hedge against the possible effectiveness of a Soviet antimissile defense, Mr. McNamara is reported to be looking with more interest than heretofore at an Air Force proposal to build a futuristic bomber. Such a bomber would carry large numbers of air-to-ground missiles designed to blast past defenses and get the bomber to its targets.

Finally, if the Russians do

want to initiate another race, officials point out, the United States can produce and turn out missiles faster than the Russians.

But with the proliferation of missiles in both countries, notwithstanding all kinds of cautions, the chances of a probably increase for an accidental or unauthorized launching of a few missiles by one side.

It is partly with this in mind—the possibility of accidental war—that some planners for immediate deployment of the Nike X antimissile system. At the LBJ Ranch last week a reporter asked Mr. McNamara whether the Soviet employment of a missile defense meant "that the Russians have the capability to take down American ballistic missiles but we do not."

"Certainly not," the secretary declared. "There is absolutely no question about the capability of penetrating Soviet defenses with both our missiles and aircraft."

Interception Capability

But while this may have answered part of the question it failed to answer it fully. Once the Soviet missile defense becomes operational, the Russians doubtless will have the capabilities of intercepting some American missiles, while the United States has no defense whatever against enemy missiles, other than on blueprints.

In the past, Mr. McNamara has opposed a full-scale deployment of the Nike X system, which would cost more than \$20-billion, because of studies that show the Russians could still penetrate enough missiles in an all-out attack to kill tens of millions of Americans.

He has considered more interesting a proposal to deploy a lighter version of Nike X, with a cost of from \$3-billion to \$3-billion, to guard against the smaller, less sophisticated threat the Chinese Communists will be able to mount in the future. Early deployment, he told Congress this year, might even force the Chinese to reconsider their plans to build an expensive ICBM arsenal.

But since the Chinese are not expected to have many ICBM's until about 1975, and since Nike X could be deployed in about six or seven years, Mr. McNamara tends to believe that there is still time to deploy against that threat in a couple of years, according to some officials.

Decision By President

The Joint Chiefs of Staff have been unanimously urging deployment of Nike X for some time. The final decision, of course, will be made by the President.

Some Pentagon officials now talk about the prospect of a

showdown. With Congress fully aware of the details of the Soviet moves, it is expected to demand a full debate on the issues.

During the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, Congress has been much more anxious to spend money on defense than the White House. Despite the immense drain on the Treasury by the Vietnam war, Congress again this year appropriated its traditional \$12-billion more than the Administration had requested for preliminary work on a new strategic defense and nearly \$168-million for advanced development of Nike X. But the extra has not been spent.

Congress becomes more aware of the details of the Soviet moves, it is expected to demand a full debate on the issues. Senator Henry M. Jackson, whose position as chairman of the Military Applications subcommittee of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy makes him privy to some of the deepest secrets of strategic intelligence, served notice of his own growing concern in a recent Senate speech. "We can no longer be assured that we own a commanding lead in the field of nuclear weapons," he declared, "and we must assume that the Soviets will narrow the gap materially if we do not do everything . . . in support of our own nuclear weapons capability."

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